

## Message Text

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ORIGIN EA-14

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY SAIGON

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E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, VS

SUBJECT: NEWS STORY ON JAILED UNION LEADERS

REF: SAIGON 7413

1. FOLLOWING STORY APPEARED IN 6/23 WASHINGTON POST, DATE-  
LINE SAIGON BY THOMAS LIPPMAN BEGIN TEXT:

THE PRESIDENTS OF FOUR SOUTH VIETNAMESE LABOR UNIONS HAVE  
BEEN HELD IN PRISON FOR MORE THAN TWO MONTHS IN WHAT SOME  
UNION SOURCES BELIEVE IS AN ATTEMPT TO DISCOURAGE LABOR  
RESISTANCE TO PRESIDENT THIEU'S DEMOCRACY PARTY.

ALL FOUR WERE SEIZED APRIL 18, THE DAY AFTER A BRIEF WORK  
STOPPAGE BY THE RAILWAY WORKERS THAT THEY ARE SAID TO HAVE  
ENDORSED. NO FORMAL CHARGES HAVE BEEN FILED AGAINST THEM,  
ACCORDING TO THEIR ASSOCIATES AND INDEPENDENT SOURCES, AND  
THERE HAS BEEN NO TRIAL. IT IS NOT KNOWN WHERE THEY ARE  
IMPRISONED OR HOW LONG THEY ARE TO BE HELD.

THE SALARY DEMAND FOR WHICH THE RAILWAY WORKERS WERE DE-  
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MONSTRATING HAS SINCE BEEN GRANTED BY THE GOVERNMENT. BUT ALL STRIKES AND DEMONSTRATIONS ARE FORBIDDEN UNDER THE COUNTRY' S MARTIAL LAW, AND THE RAILWAY UNION' S PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT HAVE GONE INTO HIDING FOR FEAR OF ARREST. THE UNION' S SECRETARY GENERAL WAS ARRESTED MORE THAN A

MONTH AFTER THE DEMONSTRATION AND IS STILL IN JAIL.

THE IMPRISONED UNION CHIEFS ARE NGUYEN THUA NHIEP, OF THE PETROLEUM WORKERS, NGUYEN VAN CUNG, OF THE ELECTRICAL WORKERS, DANG TAN SI OF THE GOVERNMENT BANK WORKERS, AND PHAM VAN HI OF THE PRIVATE BANK EMPLOYEES.

IN ADDITION, ACCORDING TO SEVERAL INFORMED SOURCES, TWO OFFICIALS OF THE HOSPITAL WORKERS UNION WERE ALSO ARRESTED RECENTLY, BUT IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER THEIR CASES ARE RELATED TO THE OTHERS.

PERHAPS 500,000 SOUTH VIETNAMESE FROM SAIGON DOCKWORKERS TO SWALLOW- NEST GATHERERS IN NHA TRANG, ARE MEMBERS OF RECOGNIZED LABOR UNIONS.

THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT HAS BEEN EXTENSIVELY SUPPORTED BY THE U. S. MISSION BOTH HAVE EXPRESSED MISGIVINGS IN RELATIONS BETWEEN LABOR AND THE GOVERNMENT, AND THIEU' S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE UNIONS IS REPORTEDLY ONE OF THE SUBJECTS TO BE ANALYZED BY A HIGH- LEVEL AFL- CIO DELEGATION THAT IS DUE HERE JULY 2. ( SIC)

REPEATED REQUESTS TO GOVERNMENT SPOKESMEN AND TO THE NATIONAL POLICE FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE CHARGES AGAINST THEM AND THEIR PROBABLE FATE HAVE GONE UNHEEDED. " THE PROBLEM," ONE INFORMED OFFICIAL SAID, " IS THAT SOME OF US KNOW, BUT NO ONE WOULD DARE TO DISCUSS IT WITH YOU."

INFORMATION ABOUT INDIVIDUAL PRISONERS IS ALWAYS DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN, SINCE IT IS COMMON PRACTICE TO MAKE ARRESTS AND IMPOSE LONG PRISON TERMS WITHOUT ANY FORMAL PUBLIC PROCEEDINGS, AND THERE IS NO RIGHT OF HABEAS CORPUS. THE GOVERNMENT INSISTS IT HAS NO POLITICAL PRISONERS, ONLY " COMMON CRIMINALS" AND COMMUNISTS, BUT THE COUNTRY' S JAILS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ARE CROWDED WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE NEVER BEEN PROVED TO BE EITHER.

HO NGOC NHUAN, A NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEPUTY WHO SPECIALIZES IN POLITICAL PRISONER CASES, SAID NEITHER HE NOR ANY OF THE LAWYERS WITH WHOM HE IS ASSOCIATED HAD BEEN ABLE TO GET INFORMATION ABOUT THE IMPRISONED LABOR LEADERS.

NHUAN, WHO BECAUSE HE HAS LEGISLATIVE IMMUNITY FROM ARREST IS ONE OF THE FEW PEOPLE WILLING TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE PUBLICLY, SAID HE AND HIS FRIENDS HAD NOT EVEN BEEN ABLE TO GET AN ARTICLE ABOUT THE ARRESTS INTO ANY LOCAL NEWS-PAPER, " BECAUSE THE PAPER WOULD JUST BE SEIZED AND ITS

OWNER FINED 2 MILLION PIASTERS."

THE ARRESTS OF THE UNION LEADERS COME WHEN THIEU' S DEMOCRACY PARTY, HAVING FAILED TO ENLIST THE SUPPORT OF ORGANIZED LABOR, IS REPORTED TO BE ATTEMPTING TO SET UP A LABOR WING OF ITS OWN.

LABOR SOURCES SAY THIS REPRESENTS CHALLENGE TO THE CONFEDERATION VIETNAMENNE DU TRAVAIL, OR CVT, THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE EQUIVALENT TO THE AFL- CIO. CVT PRESIDENT TRAN QUOC BUU HAS TURNED DOWN OFFERS OF LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN THIEU' S PARTY.

BUU WROTE TO THE MINISTER OF LABOR AND THE MINISTER OF INTERIOR IN AN UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPT TO OBTAIN THE RELEASE OF THE FOUR IMPRISONED LEADERS -- TWO OF WHOM REPRESENT UNIONS AFFILIATED WITH THE CONFEDERATION -- AND HAS TOLD FRIENDS HE IS UNHAPPY ABOUT DEMOCRACY PARTY ENCROACHMENTS ON HIS PROVINCIAL CADRES.

WHETHER THIS POLITICAL INFIGHTING HAS ANY DIRECT RELATION TO THE ARRESTS IS NOT AT ALL CERTAIN, BUT SOME SOUTH VIETNAMESE LABOR OFFICIALS BELIEVE IT DOES, AND SO DO SOME INTERESTED AMERICANS.

" WE' RE VERY CONCERNED," SAID AN AMERICAN WHO WORKS CLOSELY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WITH THE CVT ON A U. S. GOVERNMENT CONTRACT. " WE' RE TRYING TO SEE JUST HOW FAR THIEU IS GOING TO GO WITH THIS KIND OF THING,"

THE RAILWAY WORKERS' DEMONSTRATION OCCURRED ON APRIL 17 JUST AS THIEU WAS WINDING UP A VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES, WHERE HE WAS TOLD BY AMERICAN LABOR LEADERS OF THEIR CONTINUING INTEREST IN THE PROGRESS OF THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE LABOR MOVEMENT.

IT WAS A LOW- KEY DEMONSTRATION THAT LASTED ONLY TWO HOURS, ACCORDING TO THOSE WHO WATCHED IT, AND ATTRACTED LITTLE PUBLIC NOTICE. THE RAILWAY WORKERS WERE DEMANDING THAT THEY BE GRANTED RETROACTIVELY A COST OF LIVING SALARY

INCREASE THAT ALL OTHER GOVERNMENT WORKERS HAD RECEIVED  
TWO YEARS BEFORE. THE INCREASE WOULD AMOUNT TO ABOUT  
75 DOLS FOR EACH OF THE APPROXIMATELY 4,000 RAILWAYMEN.

THE DEMONSTRATION BROUGHT THE IMMEDIATE ARREST OF 26  
MIDDLE- LEVEL UNION OFFICIALS, IN A PROCEDURE THAT AN  
INFORMED AMERICAN OFFICIAL DESCRIBED AS " UNCONSCIONABLE,  
BASED ON VAGUE CHARGES, THERE WAS JUST NO SENSE TO IT."

THE 26 WERE RELEASED IN BATCHES OVER THE NEXT TWO WEEKS.  
END TEXT.

2. STORY QUICKLY GENERATED UAW INQUIRIES. REQUEST ANY  
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION EMBASSY CAN PROVIDE. ROGERS

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